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ABSTRACT

Preservice teachers often have knowledge of the latest and best educational practice and need opportunities to apply theory in a "real world" setting through optimal field placements. A review of the literature on the relationship of the preservice teacher and the cooperating teacher revealed that while serving as a cooperating teacher provided its own tensions, it also was an important professional development opportunity for the cooperating teacher. The document focuses on a highly successful 8-week preservice placement involving Mary, the cooperating teacher with more than 25 years of experience; Ann, the preservice teacher; and the university supervisor. The study also looks at the use of "whole language" method of teaching reading. Mary had little background in whole language, while Ann brought a substantial theoretical background in the method. The placement gave Ann the opportunity to apply the whole language method in a real-life situation and to get feedback and support from an experienced teacher in a collegial setting. Ann reported that though she was initially nervous about being the information provider, Mary's encouragement and eagerness to learn gave her the confidence to experiment with the whole language approach. Mary was enthusiastic about learning a new way of teaching and stressed the importance of watching Ann model the teaching; she appreciated the benefit of collaboration in developing ideas. Findings suggested that the more familiar supervisors are with what preservice teachers have learned in their classes, the better they can help and support both cooperating teachers and preservice teachers. (Contains 16 references.) (ND)

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Mary and Ann: A Reciprocal Preservice Teacher and Cooperating Teacher Relationship

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Universities are always looking for ways to improve the preservice component in their teacher education programs. Oftentimes the placement is not optimal for one, two, or all three of the key players -- preservice teacher, cooperating teacher, or university supervisor. There is a never-ending litany of horror stories from all three sectors of the preservice placement. The success stories are few and far between, but teacher education programs are working hard to make the successes outnumber the failures. Often when placements work, the university supervisor does not bring the parties together to reflect on the placement. The following article is a result of bringing the participants of a highly successful placement together to reflect on their relationship.

A reciprocity of caring (Noddings, 1984) can lead to a reciprocity of learning between cooperating and preservice teacher. When the cooperating teacher is a learner as well as mentor, and when the preservice teacher feels that the cooperating teacher cares about the preservice teacher's academic and personal welfare, the classroom becomes a learning environment for everyone including the students. The cooperating teacher becomes a model of teacher professionalism for the preservice teacher, and classrooms become communities of learners.

One of the major issues in teacher education is the lack of information about the roles of preservice teachers and cooperating teachers. Alverman (1990) suggests that research needs to be done, in the field of reading, on the master teacher's influence on the preservice teacher's development as a professional, and if there is a reciprocal nature to that influence.

The dearth of information about the relationships between preservice teachers and cooperating teachers is not only a problem in the area of reading but throughout the field of teacher education. Mari Koerner (1992) did one of the few studies of cooperating teacher and preservice teacher relationships. She used the journals of eight cooperating teachers to come up with several consequences of having student teachers; they were: 1) interruption of instruction, 2) teacher displacement, 3) disruption of classroom routine, 4) breaking teacher isolation, and 5) shifting the teacher's time and energy. These findings are consistent with findings from my conversations with teachers who have been cooperating teachers. We,

who have mentored preservice teachers, know that at the best of times being a cooperating teacher brings its own tensions to the classroom.

Koerner's study (1992) also found that because most cooperating teachers were not trained for their mentoring role, they relied on their own memories of their preservice relationship with their cooperating teacher to guide them. She also found that being a cooperating teacher served as a professional development opportunity. Two themes emerged from her data: (a) reflection about self as a practitioner and (b) reflection about the teaching profession.

Peg Graham (1993) studied the reciprocity and tensions between the cooperating teacher and the preservice teacher. She felt that the "shared classroom situation created an opportunity for genuine collaboration -- a dynamic that engages and alters both teacher and student teacher as they explore each other's intentions and reflect upon their shared work and teaching context" (p. 213). Graham asserts that the preservice teacher and cooperating teacher relationship involves two-way communication, and, as such, they "have the potential to engage and animate one another" (p. 214).

Most cooperating teachers take note of interesting lessons, techniques, and approaches as they observe preservice teachers (Bowers, 1994). They take into account how the preservice teacher delivered a lesson and how the students reacted. Cooperating teachers who are continually experimenting with new ideas acknowledge that they learn as much or more from preservice teachers than preservice teachers learn from them. For these teachers, having a preservice teacher becomes a form of professional development.

Not all teachers will serve as cooperating teachers, but all teachers will engage in some form of staff/professional development. Staff development is defined as "those processes that improve the job-related knowledge, skills, or attitudes of school employees" (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990, p. 234).

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley used the idea of individual teacher orientation to identify five models of staff development; they are (p. 235):

- individually guided staff development -- teachers plan for and pursue activities they believe will promote their own learning

- observation/assessment -- teachers get objective data and feedback on their classroom performance which may be used to select areas for growth
- development/improvement -- teachers develop curriculum, design programs, or engage in a school-improvement process to solve general or particular problems
- training -- teachers acquire knowledge or skills through appropriate individual or group instruction
- inquiry -- teachers identify an area of instructional interest, collect data, and make changes in their instruction on the basis of an interpretation of those data

Researchers found that teachers adopt new ways of teaching when they see the positive impact on their students, and when they have support from administration and colleagues (Pace, 1992; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990).

New Methodology

One of the new methods of teaching reading is the use of *whole language* instruction. Tchudi (1995, p. 38) believes that many teachers view *whole language* as crossing disciplines and integrating elementary school subjects through thematic or topical units. Goodman (1992) and Harste and Lowe (1991) believe that *whole language* is a philosophy of education that guides teachers and their teaching.

Many of today's teachers are finding that *whole language* fulfills their need to make connections between content areas, and it makes learning more experiential, relevant, and empowering for children. For other teachers, *whole language* is an unknown. These teachers are well acquainted and comfortable with the traditional classroom -- basal texts, teacher-centered, highly structured. *Whole language* means giving up the basal, empowering students, using cooperative learning, and making the classroom student-centered. When teachers take courses, attend workshops or conferences, or read the literature on the changes taking place in literacy they "begin to question lockstep teacher-and text-centered reading and writing instruction characterized by lessons focused on skill development in relative isolation from purposeful contexts" (Pace, 1992, p. 464). Pace sees three types of teachers emerge from this context (p. 464):

- teachers who begin to institute practices that reflect their point of view -- they successfully modify instruction to harmonize with *whole language*, learner-centered views that lead to literature-based, holistic instruction with a focus on meaning
- teachers who begin to look toward a new paradigm and are seeking ways to deal with the conflicts they face
- teachers who desire to change but feel the tensions are too difficult to face

All who work in education need to be aware that teachers face major sources of tension when they are implementing new programs. Pace was able to identify three sources of teacher tension: (1) old beliefs versus new beliefs, (2) implementing new curriculum and instruction while maintaining the existing curriculum, and (3) relations with teachers who were not making changes (p. 470). She suggests that the colleagial support "may be the most important element in changing classroom practice on a national scale" (p. 475). Research needs to be done on the connections between individual teachers' histories and personalities, their experiences as they shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered practices, and their perceived relationships to change agents (p. 475).

Preservice Placements

Interestingly, preservice teachers often have knowledge of the latest and best educational practices supported by solid bodies of research. What the preservice teacher needs is an optimum preservice placement that provides the opportunities to apply theory in a "real world" setting. Can preservice teachers also serve as professional developer and colleagial support for the cooperating teacher?

The idea of reciprocity of mentoring became reality during an eight week preservice placement. The placement involved Mary, the cooperating teacher with more than twenty years of experience; Ann, the preservice teacher; and me, the university supervisor. There is not much research on supervision in the preservice placement, and, although there is an orientation class for supervisors; there is not much information from which to draw for supervising. Using my experiences as a cooperating teacher, my personal experiences as a student teacher, and my discussions with other cooperating teachers, I had a

vision of what I wanted to see occur during the preservice placement. I came into the supervisory position with several beliefs that I derived from my experiences as well as other cooperating teachers' experiences with preservice teachers and university supervisors. These beliefs are:

- cooperating teachers need as much support as student teachers
- visitations need to be made frequently, at least once a week
- preservice teachers need advocates so they can test some of the theories they learned in teacher preparation classes
- cooperating teachers pick up new methods and techniques from preservice teachers

Glickman and Bey (1990) cite a number of studies that enumerate cooperating teachers' concerns. The concerns range from their classroom performance to worrying that they would not be an adequate role model or provide a good placement experience. These concerns closely match the concerns I and my fellow cooperating teachers shared.

Although a two-hour supervisory visit once every two weeks is the requirement of most universities, cooperating and preservice teachers believe that it is not enough. Occasionally questions or problems arise that need attention sooner than a two week visit will allow. Weekly visits enable the supervisor to know, understand, and help the cooperating teacher and preservice teacher better. This triadic relationship should operate the way Noddings (1984) describes as asymmetry and reciprocity in caring in education. She believes an educator's greatest obligation inside and outside of formal schooling is to nurture the ethical ideals of those with whom they come in contact. We are all dependent on each other, and we do better if we reach out to each other.

Often supervisors are the connection between coursework and classroom practice (Lemma, 1993); so they can negotiate with cooperating teachers to permit preservice teachers to practice theories learned in teacher education classes. Because preservice teachers want to maintain a good relationship with their cooperating teachers, they may not exert pressure on their cooperating teachers to design and teach their own lessons. This is especially true in placements where the theories learned at the university are in direct

opposition to the cooperating teacher's practices. It then becomes the supervisor's duty to maintain a balance between the cooperating teacher and the preservice teacher.

Personal Reflections on a Successful Placement

I came to my position of university supervisor with research on preservice and cooperating teachers, collegial feedback through discussion, and my own personal experiences as a student teacher and a cooperating teacher. Mary, the cooperating teacher, came to her position with her personal experiences as a student teacher and previous experiences as a cooperating teacher. Ann, a traditional preservice teacher, had little in her educational background from which to draw.

Mary taught in a middle to upper-middle class suburban elementary school. Her principal was new to the district and building. Whole language was not part of the school's curriculum, but there were plans to inservice the staff throughout the year so implementation could begin the following school year. Ann came to this placement with a strong background in whole language.

Discussions about teaching experiences and expectations of the placement took place at the first triadic meeting. Mary had no supervisory background, but she had a strong belief about what Ann's experiences should encompass. Ann's knowledge of whole language was stressed when Mary talked about the school's move toward whole language during the next year. Mary had not read many articles on whole language but showed an interest in knowing more about the philosophy. She was invited to ask Ann and me any questions that would enable her to get a better understanding of the nature of whole language.

In the course of the eight weekly visitations, there were observable changes in Mary's classroom. Mary moved the class to become more student-centered and less dependent on the basal text. During some of the visits Mary held long conversations with me about whole language; at other times, both she and Ann would talk with me about whole language. The observations and discussions became the basis for reflective discussion. This reflective discussion with Mary and Ann clarified my observations and discussions.

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Three weeks into the placement, Mary excitedly told me that she and Ann spent the weekend together working on a whole language unit. They incorporated all the content areas and used *Sarah, Plain and Tall* as the authentic literature connection. Ann taught the unit until two weeks before her placement ended. Mary and Ann team taught the last two weeks, with Mary taking total control the last week of the placement.

During each observation, Mary's growing enthusiasm about whole language was evident. Mary and Ann's exuberance was fascinating and contagious; we were disappointed when it was time for the placement to end. Several weeks after the placement ended, a picture of Mary's principal with the class appeared in the local newspaper. The picture showed the principal teaching the class how to weave -- it was part of the whole language unit that Mary and Ann developed.

Four months after the placement, our triad met to share reflections of the placement. I used the observations and our discussions as a basis for the topics/thoughts/ideas for reflection. I hoped that enough time had transpired to enable everyone to be objective in their reflections. Although the discussion lasted for more than an hour and a half, the major points of the discussion were punctuated with many concrete examples to prove their points. The major points encompassed: 1) mentoring, 2) their relationship, 3) modeling, 4) whole language, and 5) the role of the supervisor.

Mary started the conversation by sharing her philosophy of mentoring. She believed strongly about making sure Ann had the opportunity to enjoy a good teaching experience during the placement. Throughout Mary's career and during her educational experiences, she said that she learned through sharing and discussion. Mary went on to say that it was her responsibility to help Ann become a good teacher through sharing and collegial discussion.

To carry out this responsibility, Mary took copious notes, which she shared during supervisory visits, about Ann's teaching. These notes helped to facilitate reflective discovery because using the notes gave Mary a starting point for discussion at a later time. Mary's notes were used to show Anne growth in her teaching. Mary also videotaped Ann's teaching; together they watched and discussed the videotape.

Mary continued to share her thoughts with Ann each time she observed Ann's teaching. Ann said that she did not feel threatened by Mary because Mary kept her value judgments out of discussions of Ann's teaching.

Mary's mentoring began the day Ann began her placement and ended the day she completed the placement. In reality, the mentoring continued; Mary and Ann were still in contact throughout the second preservice placement and two months beyond. They viewed their relationship as a team effort -- both held the same beliefs about teaching (Bowers, 1994). Ann also saw the placement as an opportunity to try techniques and take advantage of Mary's expertise. Mary, Ann observed, was a good role model who reflected Ann's belief about what worked in a classroom and how a good teacher should act in and out of the classroom. Ann's previous work in classrooms did give her the opportunity to see a teacher for an entire day. Mary received such positive feedback from Ann, that she was encouraged to continue her mentoring. Mary and Ann continually supported their comments with many concrete examples.

Mary then talked about what occurred between her, Ann, and their work on the whole language unit. She shared her perceptions about the process -- she was passionate in her explanation. Mary related that when invited to ask questions about whole language, during the first triadic meeting, she recognized an opportunity to learn more about the philosophy and theory of the movement. Cognizant that Ann had knowledge of whole language and was available on a daily basis gave Mary the impetus to try integrating the content areas into a unifying theme. When Mary went to the principal to get her thoughts on permitting Ann to use a whole language approach in the classroom, the principal was very supportive. Mary then felt safe to experiment because she had a strong, caring support system that was there for her if things did not go well. With Ann starting the unit, Mary could watch Ann model teaching a whole language unit, and by the time Mary took back the classroom she felt confident enough to manage on her own. Watching and working with Ann helped Mary make the transition from her twenty-year-old basal approach to her new whole language approach.

Ann then shared her feelings about their collaboration. Because Mary was kind and eager to learn, Ann overcame her nervousness about being the information giver. She also enumerated several factors which encouraged her to move ahead and try the whole language approach: (1) Ann felt cramped by transitioning from one content area to another -- the subjects did not flow into each other, (2) the kids wanted to be active participants in the lessons, and (3) Mary's reassurance gave Ann the confidence needed to experiment. Although Ann was excited about having the chance to help design a unit, she was also concerned that the lessons might not go well. But Ann was also aware, like Mary, that she had supportive people around her that cared and would not criticize her if she failed. Ann realized that this was not only a chance to design and carry out a whole language unit, but it would also be an opportunity to give something back to Mary for being kind and accepting her as a colleague.

At this point in the reflective discussion, Mary started a monologue about her thoughts on whole language. She shared her enthusiasm about finally finding a way of teaching within the structure of the curriculum without cutting the content areas into "bits and pieces." In whole language, content areas flowed together and hooked kids by connecting with what they already know (schema). Mary stressed that: "This is life! What kids learn in a whole language classroom relates to life and their connections." Mary always had trouble believing that the individual content areas made much sense out of context. "Why wasn't this invented when I started teaching?" Much of what Mary learned about whole language, teaching, and the whole language classroom during the project, has been echoed by other educators who became whole language teachers (Goodman, 1992; Pace, 1992; Routman, 1991; Webb, Bowers, Lang, & McKinley, 1991).

Mary stressed important elements in her transition from basals to whole language: (1) the backing and support of the principal and university supervisor, (2) watching Ann model the teaching, (3) the planning and collaboration made it easier to develop the unit because they could bounce ideas off each other, (4) initial researching about whole language units and the unit design was difficult -- so was the change process, and (5) learning more than the kids -- everyone becomes a learner. Mary says that she is

now frustrated with the "old" teaching approach; "It feels like I'm teaching in a box!" She ended by stressing that she could not wait until the next school year when she could throw the old curriculum away.

Ann sat fascinated, listening to Mary's speech. Mary was like a child with a new toy -- she could not stop talking about it. As a neophyte teacher, Ann did not realize how frustrating the "old" way of teaching was. She voiced her concern about being hired into a school district that does not use a whole language approach. Ann stated that she didn't know what she would do.

As I reread my notes and listened to the tapes of the discussion, I found affirmation of my beliefs about preservice placements. The triadic relationship needs to be an integral part of the preservice placement. This relationship is a fundamental component for all three members of the team. Mentoring and collegiality can continue throughout the entire placement. The reciprocal relationship between Mary and Ann and Mary's adoption of whole language were surprising elements that surfaced during the discussion.

Although we did not address the role of reflective teaching specifically, it was easy to see during the triadic meetings and our reflective discussion that both Mary and Ann were able to critically reflect on their teaching. Writing notes and using them did show reflective practice, although Mary and Ann did not call the notes reflective writing for reflective teaching. Several other issues surfaced in the discussion.

- Mary and Ann voiced concerns about the length of the placement. They felt the placement was much too short, and they personally needed more time to learn together and to feel competent in the whole language classroom -- as much as a year. Their opinion is supported by the authors of *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1985) who believe that "prospective elementary school teachers should have more extensive preparation in reading, and perhaps in other fields as well. They require stronger training in the practical aspects of teaching" (p. 108). Meade (1991) said that student teaching should last an entire school year so student teachers can see the "ebb and flow" of schooling.

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- The partnership Ann and Mary formed enabled a feeling of mutual trust and support to evolve; because Mary cared about Ann, Ann wanted to reciprocate for Mary's kindness. The relationship evolved much in the nature of Nodding's (1984) one-caring and cared-for reciprocity.
- Although Ann and Mary viewed each other as colleagues, Mary continued mentoring and encouraging Ann to reflect throughout the placement. Contrary to Mary and Ann's mentoring relationship, Lemma (1993) found that once the student teacher begins teaching, the cooperating teacher views the preservice teacher as a colleague and is reluctant to challenge and give critical feedback to the preservice teacher.
- Mary was a teacher and life-long learner who did not become stagnant; she continually adapted new practices to her classroom.
- The support and encouragement of the principal and university supervisor gave both Mary and Ann the self-confidence to experiment with whole language. Because of the support, they both knew that failure was acceptable. Webb et al. (1991) and Pace (1992) found the biggest predictors of successful change are support from administrators and colleagues.
- The weekly visits by the university supervisor gave Mary and Ann a sense of security that what they were doing in the classroom was right. Mary needed the support as much as Ann.
- Ann believed that working with Mary on the design of the whole language unit and actually teaching the unit was good practice for her. She saw this aspect of her placement as a positive.
- Mary was at the stage in her career where she viewed learning as a whole process, the children were more than pupils, and she was still energetic and enthusiastic about teaching.
- By being part of and active in the process of adopting whole language in her classroom, Mary was eager to learn about the philosophy and more willing to see it succeed.

Research needs to be done on the relationship between cooperating teachers, preservice teachers, and university supervisors. This unique relationship needs to be the focus of extensive research and study.

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The more that is understood about these relationships, the better the placement will be for both the cooperating teacher and the preservice teacher.

Implications

Although this is a reflective piece about one relationship, I also saw this type of relationship occur in the other placements I supervised. Not all the placements were as far-reaching as this particular placement, but they did have the same reciprocity of caring.

It appears that the more familiar the supervisor is with what the preservice teachers have learned in their university classes, the better they can help both the cooperating teacher and the preservice teacher. The triadic relationship is better established and facilitated by weekly visits rather than biweekly visitations. It is also important for the supervisor to understand the need to be supportive of the cooperating teacher as well as the preservice teacher. In many situations cooperating teachers do not receive training in working with preservice teachers, so the supervisor needs training in ways to help the cooperating teacher successfully mentor the preservice teacher. The preservice placement is much more complicated than previously believed. More training for supervisors and cooperating teachers is needed in order to become successful mentors for the preservice teacher.

Much research on cooperating teachers and preservice teachers' relationships is still needed. This unique relationship needs to be the focus of extensive research. The more we can find out about these relationships, the better we can make the field placement experiences for preservice teachers and cooperating teachers.

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